DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 664 EA 018 044

AUTHOR Forsyth, Patrick B.; Boshart, Donna
TITLE Leadership Style and Principal Communication: A Preliminary Investigation.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Leadership Styles; *Organizational Communication; Organizational Effectiveness; *Principals; *Research Methodology; Teacher Administrator Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Communication Satisfaction Survey; Fiedler Contingency Model of Leader Effectiveness; Kansas; Norton Communicator Style Measure

ABSTRACT

The need for further research was indicated by the results of a limited exploration of the concept that principal's communications with teachers mediate between the principal's leadership styles and the effectiveness of the organizations they head. Twenty-seven Kansas elementary principals of schools with student populations between 215 and 315 were asked to complete Fiedler's Least Perferred Co-worker scale to determine their leadership styles. Three principals were selected from each of the style groups identified: those who were relationship-oriented, those who were task-oriented, and those dominated by neither orientation. These principals then completed the Norton Communicator Style Measure. The teachers serving under the principals completed the Communication Satisfaction Survey. Tape recordings were made of the principals' oral communications with teachers. The relationship-oriented principals saw themselves as relaxed, open, and easy-going, but their teachers were dissatisfied and they communicated least of the three groups. The principals without dominant orientation communicated most frequently, particularly concerning issues of control, but teachers were not very satisfied. Task/oriented principals focused on instructions and on personal talk and left teachers more satisfied. The results suggested that leadership style is manifested in observable behavior, but were not intended to be conclusive. (PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED263664

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patrick B. Forsyth

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Leadership Style and Principal Communication: A Preliminary Investigation

A Paper Presented at the
American Educational Research Association
1985 Chicago, Illinois

Patrick B. Forsyth, Rutgers University
Donna Boshart, Oklahoma State University

EA 018 044

Fiedler's contingency theory of leadership effectiveness has had a great deal of empirical support in the general organizational and psychological literature.[1] However, the theory has not been very useful in explaining or predicting behavior or perceptions in educational organizations.[2] Silver speculates that the repeated lack of a statistical relationship between Fiedler's leadership style construct and other school variables might be due to the inadequacy of the research conducted.[3] Other explanations are possible. It may be that Fiedler's psychological construct of leadership style (along with its measure the Least Preferred Co-worker) is too far removed from behavior to be useful in examining relationships between leadership and educationally significant variables such as instructional effectiveness.

In this paper, we investigate the possibility of examining a variable that may intervene between the psychological orientation of the leader (Fiedler's leadership style) and outcome variables such as effectiveness. Does leadership style of the principal translate into a specific perceptual or behavioral variable that is more useful in explaining leadership in school organizations? We reasoned that principal communication might serve here, since it logically intervenes between the principal's motivation and any organizational outcomes attributable to differences among principals. If communication patterns are associated with leadership styles, this report takes us one step further in tracing and explaining the path from psychological orientation (leadership style), through perception and behavior (communication), to objectively observable organizational outcomes.

The essential prognostication we advance is that, given the empirical importance of leadership style in general organizational research, the phenomenon of principal/teacher communication will be systematically affected by leadership style. If that conjecture is correct, then the impact of leadership style on organizational effectiveness might be observed as a causal chain in future research: psychological orientation affects superordinate/subordinate communication which in turn affects organizational effectiveness.

Method

To probe the question whether or not principal communication is sytematically linked to psychological leadership style, and thus potentially useful as an intervening variable between style and effectiveness variables, several unique research concerns had to be addressed. How was principal communication to be measured? Although communication has traditionally been identified as a critical element of organizational life,[4] operationalization of communication has been problematic. The choice of method for examining principal communication for the purposes we have outlined in this study was particularly crucial because of the linking role we hoped to establish for communication in future leadership style-effectiveness studies. We wanted to capture a good deal of the communication variance among school principals.

A second related question had to do with the lack of a relationship between leadership style (LPC) and other variables in the study of educational organizations. In order to assure ourselves that the communication phenomenon and its relationship to principal leadership style were examined thoroughly, we were determined to examine a

complete picture of communication, one that was not limited by the characteristics of particular methodological procedures.

A solution to these quandaries is suggested by Jick,[5] who advocates the use of triangulation (the use of multiple methods to study a single phenomenon) in organizational research. He lists some possible advantages of this approach: 1) greater confidence in results, 2) stimulation of creation of new ways of capturing a problem, 3) uncovering the deviant dimension, 4) the synthesis or integration of theories, and 5) critical test for competing explanations, given its comprehensiveness.[6] These advantages appeared desirable and particularly appropriate for the research problem we had constructed. Hence, a decision was made to study principal communication using multiple methods, in the hope that the data would prove convergent.

In order to take advantage of triangulation for the study of communication, several very different instruments for examining the communicaton of the principal were considered. We found instruments or methods that: 1) asked the principals directly about their communication with subordinates, 2) asked teachers about the principals' communication, and 3) guided the direct observation of an organizational communicator. The instruments or methods that we eventually selected are charted in the table below to demonstrate how they differ and to highlight how this group of methods does indeed represent a triangulation approch.

Table 1. Instrument Profile

	Obtrusiveness	Source	Focus of Inquiry	Directness
CSM	Obtrusive	Principal	Feelings	Direct
CSS	Obtrusive	Principals' Subordinates	Perceptions	Direct
Audio Tape	Obtrusive to Unobtrusive	Objectively Observed Behavior	Behavior	Indirect

The three methods for examining principal communication will be discussed in turn, however, it should be pointed out that the greatest difference among these methods appears to be in the focus of inquiry column. Each of the approaches focuses on a different aspect of the communication phenomenon.

The Norton Communicator Style Measure (CSM). Data about the communicaton style of each principal were collected by means of the self-administered Norton Communicator Style Measure.[7] Each of nine subscales is composed of five Likert-type items with five-point response categories ranging from almost always to almost never. The lower the score, the more characteristic is the dimension of the individual. The CSM contains the following dimensions of communicator style:

1) **Dominant** - communicator tends to take charge of social interactions;
2) **Dramatic** - communicator manipulates exaggerations, fantasies, stories, metaphors, rhythm, voice and other stylistic devices to highlight or understate content;

3) **Contentious** - communicator is argumentative;

4) **Animated** - communicator makes use of physical, non-verbal cues;

5) **Impression Leaving** - communicator is remembered because of the communicative stimuli projected;

6) **Relaxed** - communicator uses a calm voice, an inoffensive manner, and a controlled aura which is open and friendly;

7) **Attentive** - communicator conveys a sense of empathy;

8) **Open** - communicator is characterized as being conversational, expansive, affable, convivial , gregarious, unreserved, somewhat frank, extroverted, and approachable;

9) **Friendly** - communicator is placid to deeply intimate, referred to as a stroking function by Norton;

Reliabilities for the subtests have been reported on a sample of 500 cases. In general, they are acceptable, given the small number of items and short scale range: dominant (.82), dramatic (.68), contentious (.65), animated (.56), impression leaving (.69), relaxed (.71), attentive (.57), and friendly (.37).

Communication Satisfaction Survey (CSS). Data about teacher satisfaction with organizational communication were collected using Downs and Hazen's Communication Satisfaction Survey (CSS). It is a seven factor questionnaire consisting of 40 items. Each Likert-type item contains a seven point response set ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. A lower score indicates greater satisfaction with organizational communication. The CCS contains the following dimensions of teacher satisfaction with communication:

1) **Personal Feedback** - indicates how a person is doing in his/her job and the satisfaction with the feedback;
2) **Relationship with Supervisor** - indicates whether one is satisfied with the communication between oneself and the supervisor ;
3) **Communication Climate** - indicates the degree to which people have positive attitudes about communicating with those with whom they work;
4) **Organizational Integration** - indicates whether one is satisfied that one gets the necessary information needed to do one's job;
5) **Horizontal Communication** - indicates the degree to which the respondents are satisfied with the communication with coworkers;
6) **Media Quality** - indicates the degree to which people are satisfied with the amount and quality of information available through company publications;
7) **Corporate Perspective** - indicates degree of satisfaction with information received about company policies and goals, relevant government action, etc.

Down and Hazen tested their instrument in four different organizational settings and factoring procedures were used to establish the stability of the factors. The test-retest reliability coefficient for the entire instrument is .94, however reliability scores for the individual subtests are not available from the authors.[8]

Oral Communication. Lastly, to complete the investigation of the

communication milieu, field data about the oral communication of principals were examined through an analysis of tape recordings of their verbal interactions. The principals conversations were tape recorded for five consecutive days. The recordings of the third and fourth days were analyzed according to predetermined categories. Analysis included observation of content, frequency, and length of principal-teacher interactions.

The category system used to classify principal-teacher oral communication was Katz and Kahn's taxonomy of downward communication.[9] They distinguished five types of downward communication, although there appears to be no reason the categories cannot be used to describe, in this study, interactions initiated by teachers, as well as those initiated by the principal. The descriptions below not only include the specifications of Katz and Kahn, but they also incorporate specific kinds of oral communication included under the category in this study.

1) **Job Instructions** - specific task directives, requests or reports. Subcategories of the job instruction category include messages concerning students, and meetings or phone calls for staff members, requests which include gaining information and compliance of duties, direct orders and the reporting of incidents.

2) **Job Rationale** - conversations designed to provide teachers with a full understanding of their jobs and how the work is related to other jobs. Job rationale statements let the teacher know what is to be done and why it is done and how the patterned activities

in which the teacher is involved accomplish a given objective. In this study, communication related to instruction, curriculum and testing, discipline, student placement in regular and special programs, acquisition, placement and rationale of ordering materials and equipment, activities for students, and the condition of facilities were included under the category of job rationale.

3) **Procedures and Practices** - school procedures and practices. Included here were oral statements related to policy, funding for the district, sick leave and substitutes, ordering procedures, attendance, school functions calendar, extracurricular activities, salary schedules, and fire and tornado drills.

4) **Feedback and Reporting** - information given to an individual concerning evaluation, discipline, rumor follow-up, review of teacher performance, merit recognition and encouragement, location of programs, school activities, and feedback concerning school finance.

5) **Indoctrination of Goals** - information for the total system or a major subsystem. Included here were communication having to do with the forming of rules at the building level, ideological commitment, and cooperative programs to meet goals.

A sixth category not contained in Katz and Kahn's taxonomy was included in this study to classify principal-teacher discussion that was not job related.

6) **Personal** - greetings, comments concerning the tape recorder, illness, weather, personal business, small talk, and joking.

Leadership Style (LPC). Fiedler's Least Preferred Co-worker questionnaire was used to determine leadership style. The LPC version used in this study is a semantic differential scale containing 18 bipolar items producing a test range of 18 to 144. Fiedler lists the internal consistency as ranging from .85 to .95.[10] Fiedler identified the **task-oriented** leaders as scoring 57 or below on the LPC. **Relationship-oriented** leaders score 64 or above on the LPC. Those scoring between 57 and 64, we called **no-dominance oriented**. Fiedler argues that the test distinguishes those leaders whose satisfaction derives from task accomplishment from those who are primarily satisfied by successful interpersonal interactions. This concept is clearly a psychological orientation rather than a pattern of behavior.

Sample and Data Collection. Thirty Kansas elementary principals were randomly selected from among all schools having a student population in the range between 215 and 315. Fiedler's Least Preferred Co-worker (LPC) was self-administered to this group with a 90% response rate. Of the 27 responding principals, 11 were classified as relationship-oriented, 5 were no-dominance oriented, and 11 were task oriented. Three principals were then randomly selected from each of the three categories to be the subjects of this study. As it happened, the principals were all male, which eliminated the confounding effects of gender. All principals had at least one prior year and in most cases five or more years of experience in the same position.

The Norton Communicator Style Measure (CSM) was then administered to each of the nine principals. Teachers in the schools of the selected principals were asked to complete the Communication Satisfaction Survey

(CSS) at the first faculty meeting of the year. At the time of that meeting, teachers were introduced to the notion that the principal would soon be wired for sound. The principals then wore a tape recorder for five consecutive days. The recorders were worn conspicuously. Only days three and four of the recordings were analyzed for this report. The principals indicated to the researchers that, by the end of the second day, teachers appeared relaxed and spoke freely in the presence of the the recording device. A test run of this procedure was conducted prior to the collection of data for this study. Those test tapes allowed the researchers to confirm the utility of the Katz and Kahn taxonomy and to add the personal category discussed above. We were also relatively certain, as a result of the test run, that the novelty of the tape recorder would not affect the teachers after a short time.

Findings and Discussion

The findings presented here are based on nine principals and their schools. We present no statistical analysis nor any claim that these data are generalizable to some population. The purpose of this paper is served by the degree to which these limited data make sense in view of our earlier conjecture that leadership style might be translated into an intervening set of communication variables more likely to be systematically related to educational outcomes. We argue that the data collected here should suggest the likelihood of success our approach might have.

In Table 2, the average scores on principal self-perceived communication style are displayed for each of the three leadership styles. For example, the average score for the three No-dominant principals was

Table 2: CSM Averages by Leadership Style

Communicator Style	Relationship Oriented Principals	No-Dominant Oriented Principals	Task Oriented Principals
Dominant	18.33■	16.00*	16.66
Dramatic	16.66■	15.33	14.00*
Contentious	15.00	13.00*	18.00■
Animated	12.66	13.66■	12.33*
Impression Lv	12.66	14.33■	11.33*
Relaxed	13.33*	13.33*	13.33■
Attentive	13.66	13.00■	11.66*
Open	13.66*	15.33■	14.33
Friendly	11.66	13.66■	10.33*

* = most ■ = least

lowest for the Dominant dimension of the CSM. The lower the score, the more the group possesses the characteristic in question. Thus, the No-dominant principals proved to be most Dominant of the three leadership styles. A self-perception profile can be constructed from Table 2 by noting what is characteristic of each leadership style and what is not characteristic.

Relationship Oriented Principals	No-Dominant Oriented Principals	Task Oriented Principals
relaxed open	dominant contentious relaxed	dramatic animated impression leaving attentive friendly
non-dominant non-dramatic	non-animated non-impression leaving non-attentive non-open non-friendly	non-contentious non-relaxed

These profiles, based on self report, are quite distinctive. The relationship-oriented principals see themselves as laissez faire communicators. While the no-dominant oriented principals also perceived themselves as relaxed, they also reported that their communication was controlling . Finally, task-oriented principals reported that their communication was amiable and energetic, but not relaxed. Perhaps the most that can be said here is that the characteristics appear to cluster in a reasonable fashion.

In Table 3, the average scores for teacher satisfaction with organizational communication are displayed, again, for each of the three leadership styles and by satisfaction category. The lower the score, the more satisfied the teacher group was with that dimension of organizaional communication. A satisfaction profile can be constructed from Table 3 by noting the highest and lowest scores and translating those into dissatisfation and satisfaction respectively.

	Relationship Oriented Principals	No-Dominant Oriented Principals	Task Oriented Principals
corporate perspective	dissatisfied	-----	satisfied
personal feedback	dissatisfied	-----	satisfied
organization integration	dissatisfied	-----	satisfied
relationship with supervisor	dissatisfied	-----	satisfied
communication climate	dissatisfied	-----	satisfied
horizontal communication	dissatisfied	satisfied	-----
media quality	dissatisfied	satisfied	-----

In Table 4, the average number of communications and number of

Table 3: CSS Averages by Leadership Style

Communication Satisfaction Dimensions	Relationship Oriented Principals	No-Dominant Oriented Principals	Task Oriented Principals
Corporate Perspective	15.88	15.82	13.89
Personal Feedback	15.68	14.90	14.68
Organization Integration	13.75	13.11	12.48
Relationship with Supervisor	13.92	12.63	12.05
Communication Climate	15.72	14.47	13.60
Horizontal Communication	14.05	13.51	13.72
Media Quality	13.46	12.01	12.11

5-9 = very satisfied
9-13 = satisfied
14-18 = somewhat satisfied
19-21 = indifferent
22-26 = somewhat dissatisfied
31-35 = very dissatisfied

Table 4: Oral Communication of Principals by Leadership Style: Frequency and Time in Minutes

Communication Category	Relationship Oriented Principals		No-Dominant Oriented Principals		Task Oriented Principals	
	#	min.	#	min.	#	min.
Job Rationale	29	84.16	90	196.00	47	20.52
Instructions	27	14.48	63	32.42	81	48.05
Personal	16	14.44	78	58.40	50	113.55
Procedures and Policies	10	15.46	30	60.07	16	15.50
Feedback	8	20.02	17	24.25	9	4.17
Indoctrination of Goals	0	00.00	7	26.26	0	00.00
TOTAL	90	149.36	285	398.20	203	202.59

minutes are displayed, by category, for each of the three leadership styles. A profile of the objectively recorded communication can be constructed for each of the styles.

Communication Category	Relationship Oriented Principals number	$\bar{X}$	No-Dominant Oriented Principals number	$\bar{X}$	Task Oriented Principals number	$\bar{X}$
Job Rationale	least	2.89	most	2.18	----	.45
Instructions	least	.52	----	.50	most	.59
Personal	least	.88	----	.74	most	2.28
Procedures and Practices	least	.38	most	2.00	----	1.06
Feedback	least	2.50	most	1.40	----	.44
Indoctrination of Goals	----		most	3.70	----	
Total	least	1.65	most	1.40	----	1.00

The **relationship-oriented** principals interacted with teachers least frequently in all categories. However, it should also be pointed out that their interactions in the categories of job rationale and feedback, while least frequent, were relatively long (nearly three minutes on average). **No-dominant-oriented** principals spoke most often with teachers in the categories of job rationale, procedures and practices, feedback, and indoctrination. On the whole, no-dominant-oriented principals interacted more frequently than either of the other types of principals. **Task-oriented** principals gave more instructions than the principals from the other two styles, but, they also interacted more often in the category called personal. The average endurance of the personal interactions was, for the task-oriented principals, nearly two-and-a-half times that of

relationship-oriented and no-dominant-oriented principals.

At this point, we return to some of Jick's reasons for using triangulation. Our hope was that the data collected on the principal's communication (feelings, perceptions of teachers, and objectively recorded verbal behavior) would be convergent in support of the notion that a principal's leadership style would cause that principal to feel differently about self, be perceived differently by teachers, and, indeed, focus verbal communication on different issues.

Fiedler's three leadership styles did produce very different profiles for feelings about self, perceptions of teachers, and verbal behavior. From the perspective of triangulation, however, the issue is whether these different profiles fit together. Do they converge? Is there a deviant dimension?

These cases would seem to suggest that **relationship-oriented** principals are a portrait of failed communication. These are the Charlie Browns of school administration; relaxed, open, easy-going. However, these principals communicate less on every dimension from personal issues to indoctrination of goals, and, the teachers are dissatisfied with every communication category under the relationship-oriented principals.

The **no-dominant-oriented** principals might be characterized as using strong, but quiet, paternal control. They see themselves as dominant and contentious, but relaxed. They appeared to communicate more frequently than either of the other two leadership styles, particularly in categories that manifest control: job rationale, procedures and practices, feedback, and indoctrination of goals. yet, teachers were not very satisfied with communication in the schools having no-dominant-oriented principals. Teachers were satisfied with horizontal communication, an area over which

the principal's control is minimal, and media quality, probably the least significant communication category.

The **task-oriented** principals saw themselves as dramatic and friendly. Objectively, their verbal communication with teachers focused on instructions and personal talk. These categories parallel the traditional dimensions of effective leaders: initiation of structure and consideration. Not surprisingly then, teachers were most satisfied with the communication in schools having task-oriented principals, especially the dimensions of communication under the influence of the principal.

It might be argued that these data are convergent and that it is likely that communication phenomena do systematically intervene between the leadership style of the principal and any outcome variables we might care to examine in school settings. Thus, in future applications of Fiedler's contingency theory to the study of school effectiveness, it would appear useful to not only measure the principal's leadership style, but also to determine how that style is delivered to the school organization through a communication milieu. No claim is made that these nine schools are representative of all schools, however, the convergence of the communication data hint at an interesting line of inquiry.

NOTES

1. See: F.E. Fiedler, A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967); D.E. Hovey, "The Low-powered Leader Confronts a Messy Problem: A Test of Fiedler's Theory," Academy of Management Journal 17, (1974), pp. 358-362; L.K. Michaelsen, "Leader Orientation, Leader Behavior, Group Effectiveness and Situational Favorability: An Empirical Extension of the Contingency Model," Organizational Behavior and Human Performance 9, (1973), pp. 226-245; R.W. Rice and M.M. Chemers, "Predicting the Emergence of Leaders Using Fiedler's Contingency Model of Leadership Effectiveness," Journal of Applied Psychology 57, (1973), pp. 281-287; M.M. Chemers and G.J. Skrzpek, "An Experimental Test of the Contingency Model of Leadership Effectiveness," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 24, (1972), pp. 172-177.
2. See: M.W. Hopfe, "Leadership Style and Effectiveness of Department Chairmen in Business Administration," Academy of Management Journal 13, (1970), pp. 301-310; P. Garland and R.R. O'Reilly, "The Effect of Leader Member Interaction on Organizational Effectiveness," Educational Administration Quarterly 12, (1976), pp. 9-30; Y.M. Martin, G.B. Isherwood, and R.E. Lavery, "Leadership Effectiveness in Teacher Probation Committees," Educational Administration Quarterly 12, (1976), pp. 87-99; W.H. Holloway and G.A. Niazi, "A Study of Leadership Style, Situation Favarableness, and the Risk Taking Behavior of Leaders, Journal of Educational Administration 16, (1978), pp. 160-168; A.J. Galfo, "Measurement of Group Versus Educational Leaders' Perception of Leadership Style and

Administrative Theory Orientation," Journal of Educational Research 18, (1975), pp. 310-314; C.G. Miskel, "Principals' Attitudes Toward Work and Co-Workers, Situational Factors, Perceived Effectiveness, and Innovative Effort," Educational Administration Quarterly 13, (1977), pp. 51-70.

3. Paula Silver, Educational Administration: Theoretical Perspectives on Practice and Research (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 168.
4. See: Chester I. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938); and Herbert A. Simon, Administrative Behavior, 2nd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1957).
5. Todd D. Jick, "Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in Action," Administrative Science Quarterly 24 (1979), p. 602.
6. Jick, Ibid., pp. 608-609.
7. Robert W. Norton, "Foundations of a Communication Style Construct," Human Communication Research 4, (1978), pp. 99-112.
8. Cal W. Downs and Michael D. Hazen, "A Factor Analytic Study of Communication Satisfaction," Journal of Business Communication 14, (1977), pp. 63-73.
9. Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organizations (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966).
10. Fiedler, Ibid.